

160th SOAR Soldiers earn Distinguished Flying Cross

By Kelly Ann Tyler
160th SOAR (A) Public Affairs

A battalion commander praised his Soldiers during a ceremony, calling them “the finest aviators in the Army.”

Seven Distinguished Flying Crosses, as well as 80 other awards, were presented to 66 Soldiers from the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne) by Lt. Col. Gregory Petrik, commander of the regiment’s 2nd Battalion, and Lt. Gen. Philip R. Kensinger Jr., commanding general of the U.S. Army Special Operations Command.

“The American people will never know the true sacrifices that these Soldiers made to accomplish the missions,” Petrik said. “These Soldiers, who are the finest aviators in the Army, performed missions that were incredible and made them seem routine.”

The DFC recipients were:

Maj. Thomas R. Drew, 41, of Clarksville, Tenn., an MH-60L Black Hawk helicopter pilot and air mission commander during Operation Iraqi Freedom on April 2, 2003.

Maj. Michael Lewis, 39, of Eugene, Ore., an MH-47E Chinook pilot during Operation Iraqi Freedom on April 2, 2003.

Chief Warrant Officer Steven A. Lapping, 39, of Laurel, Md., an AH-6 Little Bird helicopter pilot during Operation Iraqi Freedom on April 2, 2003.

Chief Warrant Officer John Nailor, 38, Mechanicsburg, Pa., an MH-47E Chinook pilot during Operation Iraqi Freedom on April 7, 2003.

1st Sgt. John Wade, 34, of Logan, W. Va., an MH-47E Chinook flight engineer during Operation Enduring Freedom on Oct. 19, 2001.

Staff Sgt. Matthew W. Hubbard, 33, of Butler, Mo., an MH-60L Black Hawk crew chief and gunner during Operation Iraqi Freedom on April 2, 2003.

Sgt. Jayson R. Sorensen, 26, of Seeley Lake, Mont., an MH-47E Chinook crew chief and machine gunner during Operation Iraqi Freedom on April 7, 2003.

More than 70 Air Medals were presented, six of them with valor devices. Numerous other awards were presented during the ceremony all of which were given in support of Operations Enduring and Iraqi Freedom.

The Valorous Unit Award was presented to 2nd Battalion for extraordinary heroism in combat. The degree of heroism required for the unit award is the same as that which would warrant award of the Silver Star to an individual.

“The Valorous Unit Award presented to the battalion today is for a five-month period of intense combat operations that the regiment had never experienced before,” Petrik said.

“(Elements of the 160th) deployed in early October 2001 and started flying the first missions taking Special Forces teams into Afghanistan shortly thereafter. This ultimately led to the collapse of the Taliban and the defeat of al-Qaeda forces.

"Many (awards) were given for missions that remain classified. Except for those who were on them, we may never know the full details about these missions," he said.

"Many of these missions were flown under zero illumination in unforgiving terrain while encountering intense enemy fire that included small arms, rocket-propelled grenades, surface to air missiles and anti aircraft artillery. All were done while supporting multiple combined/joint special operations task forces."

More than 140 DFCs have been presented to members of the 160th SOAR since October 2001. The VUA was also awarded to F and D Companies, 1st Battalion, 160th SOAR, and to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 160th SOAR because they were part of the 2nd Battalion, 160th SOAR task force during the award period.

The 160th is the Army's only special operations aviation unit. The unit provides rotary wing support to multiservice Special Operations Forces, including Rangers, Special Forces, Navy SEALs, Air Force battlefield airmen and Marine elements. Members of the regiment have been almost continuously deployed in support of the Global War on Terrorism since October 2001.

